

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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TAKING HOLD UPON GOD.

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## A Sermon

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"There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee."—Isaiah lxiv. 7.

ISAIAH in the chapter before us describes a very mournful condition of the people of God. He feels the case to be so desperate that he sighs for a divine interposition—"Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down." He perceives that the people are so steeped in slumber, so utterly under the power of their sins that, unless God himself shall descend with all the power and terror of Sinai, the nation will utterly perish through its iniquity, even as withered leaves are blown away by the fierce winds. He longed for a melting fire to dissolve their hard hearts; for a swift flame such as burns the brushwood on the mountain's side to make a speedy end of their false confidences; and for a burning heat, such as maketh the waters to boil, to remove the lukewarmness of those who professed to worship the Lord.

I do not know that the condition of the church of God at the present time is quite so bad as that which is here described. It would be wrong to boast of our condition, but it would be worse to despair of it. It would not be honest to apply the words of our text to the church of the present day. Blessed be God, we could not say, "There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee," for there are many who plead day and night for the prosperity of Zion. Yet in a measure we are somewhat in the same plight as that which is described by the prophet, and there is much to mourn over. Prayer languishes in many churches, power in intercession is by no means a common attainment, and meetings for prayer are, as a rule, thinly attended, and not much thought of. Sin abounds, empty profession is common, hypocrisy is plentiful, and the life of God in the soul is but little esteemed.

Notice carefully that according to our text the prophet traces much of the evil which he deplored to the lack of prayer. After he has compared their righteousnesses to filthy rags he adds, "there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." When

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there is a degeneracy of public manners, you may be sure that there has also occurred a serious decline of secret devotion. When the outward service of the church begins to flag and her holiness declines, you may be sure that her communion with God has been sadly suspended. Devotion to God will be found to be the basis of holiness and the buttress of integrity. If you backslide in secret before God, you will soon err in public before men. You may judge yourselves, my dear hearers, as to your spiritual state by the condition of your hearts in the matter of prayer. How are you at the mercy seat? for that is what you really are. Are the consolations of God small with you? That is a minor matter; look deeper,—Is there not a restraining of prayer before the living God? Do you find yourself weak in the presence of temptation? That is important; but search below the surface, and you will find that you have grown lax in supplication, and have failed to keep up continual communion with God.

The prophet also reveals the very essence and soul of prayer. It is a stirring up of one's self to take hold of God. If in prayer we do not take hold of God, we have prayed but feebly, if at all. The very soul of devotion lies in realising the divine presence, in dealing with God as a real person, in firm confidence in his faithfulness,—in a word, in "taking hold of him." Men do not take hold of a shadow, they cannot grasp the unsubstantial fabric of a dream. Taking hold implies something real which we grasp; and there is wanted to make prayer truthful and acceptable with God the grip and grasp of a tenacious faith, which believes the fact that God is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Taking hold implies a reverent familiarity with the Lord, by which we use a holy force to win a blessing from his hand. It was because there was so little of this in Israel, that the nation had fallen into so forlorn a state; and if you trace up the evils of the church at the present day to their source it will come to this, that there are so few who stir up themselves to take hold upon the living God, so few who grapple with spiritual matters in downright earnest, and bring them before the Lord with resolute faith. We have few Elijahs now, and Jacobs are hard to find. Why, look ye, sirs, there are many whose religion is nothing but a mere outward performance, it consists in attendance upon a place of worship so many times on the Sabbath, the reading of prayers in the family, the repetition of a form of devotion night and morning, and perhaps the mechanical reading of a chapter; but there is no consciousness that God is near, no converse with him, no taking hold upon him. In the case of such persons the "Thou God seest me" of Hagar in the wilderness has never leaped from their lips, neither have they cried like David, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." God is far off from them even when they pray: they never dream that they are speaking into his ear. They believe there is a God, but they act as if there were none. He does not influence them, their lives are not inspired by his presence, or ennobled by his smile. Their religion is practically godless, and therefore worthless. In vain is it that they are regular at services and attentive at sermons if their hearts stop short of God himself. Their service may be in all respects proper and orderly, but if there be no taking hold of God it is lifeless and useless: a garnished sepulchre, and not a temple. "God

with us," in our flesh, is our Saviour: "God with us," by his Spirit, proves that we are saved.

Laying hold upon God is not the act of a dead man, neither is it the deed of one who is destitute of spiritual perception; it is the act of one who is quickened and kept alive by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Those who are at enmity with God neither can nor will take hold of him, for "they say unto God, depart from us: for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

Men will do anything sooner than stir up themselves to take hold of God: they will build churches, and rear altars, and say masses and perform pilgrimages, and a thousand other things, but they do not want God, and will not have him. To go through a round of performances is very easy work compared with thought, and consideration, and the yielding of the heart. You may in religious matters make yourself like the brickmaker's blind horse, which goes round and round at his pug-mill, but knows nothing about what he is doing. Such worship God regardeth not: as well might we set automatons to pray and wax figures to move in and out of church doors. God is a Spirit, and to grasp a spirit is not everyday work. Only a spiritual man can do anything of the kind or know what it means. A man must be stirred up and have all his faculties awake, and his entire mental and spiritual nature thrown into energetic action before he will be able to cope with this mystery, and take hold on him that made the heavens and the earth, who is not seen of the eye nor heard of the ear, and is only to be apprehended by the inner spirit of man. I pray God that I may be helpful, as he shall please, in stirring up many of you to take hold upon the Lord with all your heart and soul and strength. If such shall be the case, it will be a great blessing to the churches to which you belong, a great blessing to the society in which you move.

At this present I shall not attempt more than the task of describing certain forms in which taking hold upon God is exceedingly desirable at this present time. The same principle in different stages of spiritual life is seen in varying forms, let me point out four of the most needful; and may the Holy Ghost enable some among us to stir up themselves for the holy effort.

I. The first form of taking hold, that which is intended in the text, is that in which **THE AWAKENED SINNER TAKES HOLD UPON GOD**; and here I shall be addressing myself, I hope, to many now present who are sincerely anxious to find present salvation. If you really wish to be reconciled to God, and to be pardoned by the great Father at once, hearken diligently unto me, and hear, that your souls may live. Your only hope lies in taking hold upon God. Startle not, but hearken and obey. It is great condescension on the Lord's part that he should permit it to be so, but so it is, that when he bares his right arm to smite you your safety lies in grasping that very hand which apparently is lifted for your destruction. He says by the mouth of the prophet, "Let him lay hold on my strength, and let him make peace with me." As a child when his father is about to chasten him will often seize his father's hand and with many tears entreat him to forbear the rod, so will you do if you act wisely. You are to run in, as it were, into God, and shelter in the very rock which frowns upon you. Though he seemeth to be a destroyer,

if you can but trust him you will find him to be your Saviour. You must say, as John Bunyan once did, "I was so driven that I would have run to Christ, even if he had stood with a pike in his hand, yea, I would have run upon the very point thereof sooner than be as I then was." It is so wretched a thing to be without God that one may gladly dare any calamity in venturing to approach him, though in truth there is no cause for fear. God has been pleased to reveal himself in the person of his dear Son Jesus Christ, who lived and died for the salvation of men; and whosoever will trust God as he is revealed in Christ Jesus shall find forgiveness for all his sins, shall obtain a new nature, shall enter upon a new life, and shall be the heir of a blessed immortality. This is the way of salvation which God appoints, namely, that you now at once heartily trust in his Son.

However strange this method may appear to you, judge not according to the sight of the eyes, but accept what the Lord sets before you. That must be best for you which God thinks best: if it satisfies your Maker it may well satisfy you. But indeed you have no choice; you are shut up to this one method of deliverance. Trust in Christ will save you; but "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Do you understand me? The way of life is to take hold of God in Christ Jesus. You are charged with sin: do not deny it, for such a course will be your ruin: take hold upon the accusation, and confess it. Stand where the accusation places you in conscious guilt, and repent as you stand there: then turn you unto God, and say to him, "It is written in thine own word, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' Lord, *Thou* knowest I am a sinner, and *I* also feel it. I cast myself upon the faithful saying, and trust in thee to save me through Jesus Christ thy Son." This is taking hold upon God, and when you have so done you shall find salvation; yea, you are saved.

I think I hear you say, "But how shall I take hold on God? I who am so vile, so weak, so far off from him." He has given you many points by which you may grasp him. You may take hold upon certain of his attributes, and especially upon his mercy. "He delighteth in mercy." Can you not trust the God who is ready to pardon, and eager to receive his returning child? Remember his lovingkindness, and the multitude of his tender mercies, and call to mind the fact that he has declared that he hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but that he should turn to him and live. Can you not cast anchor in the harbour of infinite mercy, as seen in the provision of a divine Saviour? Can you not find foothold for faith on that blessed and sure word, "His mercy endureth for ever"? This is the star of the sinner's night, the dawn of his day of hope. There is forgiveness with God that he may be feared; with him is plenteous redemption. O poor sinking soul, take hold of this, believe that God for Christ's sake can justly pardon the guilty, and plead with him to do so in your case. Urge your suit upon this plea, and it will not fail you.

Perhaps your mind can better settle upon a promise. Well, it will little matter which one of them it is, for though they are very many, they are all equally certain; but do try to take hold of the Lord by one

or other of those hand-holds which he has provided on purpose for seeking souls. Hold him by such a word as this, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Or take hold upon that other gracious invitation, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." There are many such words of grace, and, as I have already told you, they are all equally sure. Like the great roads which all meet in London, so any promise will lead you to God. Fix your grasp of faith on that which best suits your character and condition, and you are at once in contact with God : only do take hold, and do not trifle with the promise, or stagger at it. O sinner, arouse yourself to take hold upon the loving word ; be in earnest, man, for it is your life, and when you once get hold, let your grip be as an iron vice, grapple the promise to thee as with hooks of steel. Plead after this fashion, "Thou hast said it, O God, and I believe it, and I trustfully look to thee to be as good as thy word. On this thy promise I depend, and I am persuaded thou wilt keep thy word."

Perhaps the character of our Lord Jesus Christ may furnish you with a holdfast. Remember who and what he was, and remember that whatever Christ was that God is, for he himself testified, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Recollect how Jesus put the message of love, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; *for I am meek and lowly in heart* : and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Could you not trust the meek and lowly one ? Say, can you not readily trust Jesus ? Do you fear Immanuel or dread the Lamb of God ? Bleeding on the tree, with no thunder in his hand nor terror on his brow, can you not confide in him ? His dying body by every wound invites the sons of men to find a shelter in the riven rock. Take at once firm hold of God. The body of his incarnate Son and all his blessed doing and dying stand before you as so many points of attraction. Turn not away, but let the God of love be your God now and for ever.

Can you not take hold of him through the gospel : the gospel which publishes salvation to the most ungodly ? What say you to this, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" ? "He that believeth on him is not condemned." "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." What a number of persons have laid hold of God through that precious text. It stands like an open door with width enough to admit a giant in sin. Some who could never find comfort anywhere else have caught at that encouragement, and found peace with God at once. Why should you not ? Note this one also. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," and this, "Who-soever will, let him come and take the water of life freely." By some one or other of those gospel declarations I do in the name of Jesus entreat every guilty sinner to take hold of God. Again, I say, do not run from him, or from the facts of your sad case : do not try to forget what you are towards him, nor forget what he must be towards you if you continue in your sin ; but come now in an honest manner,

and meet the truth face to face. Make this firm resolve, that you will be a stranger to your God no longer. Say in your soul, "I will take hold of God this day, as he presents himself to me in his word." Put forth your hand and touch the hem of Jesus' garment if you can do no more, and he will not spurn you, but give you immediate salvation.

The text speaks of a man's stirring up himself to lay hold on God, and that is the point to which I long to see you brought. I would that every unconverted man were at this moment aroused out of his deadly slumber. You will not take hold on God while you are asleep in sin's downy bed. Believe me, no sinner is saved while his mind is in a dreamy, hesitating, lethargic condition. You need to be stirred up to make your calling and election sure. Surely such a business should be earnestly attended to. Let your memory be stirred up to recollect your sin, and your soul to repent of it. Let your conscience be stirred up to remind you of the guilt of that sin, and your heart to make a full confession of it with deep shame and bitter sorrow. Let your fears be stirred up to apprehend the wrath to come, and your hopes to remind you of the possibilities of everlasting life and glory. Let your desires be awakened this morning, and may you be set longing and crying after mercy; and with your desires may your will awaken, only not as it has been accustomed to be, in vicious obstinacy, setting itself against God, but made willing to obey in the day of the Lord's power. May his Holy Spirit arouse reason and thought, understanding and the affections, yea, your whole man. As when in business you are about to do something of extreme importance you arouse yourself and endeavour to have all your wits about you, so now come to this great business of your soul's salvation with all your thoughts aroused and all your energies excited, for all these are needful. Is it not a concern of the utmost weight? Since the prize is worth the winning, and the loss will be intolerable, be stirred up with strong resolve that, if grace and mercy are to be had by laying hold on God, you will have them at this very hour.

Brethren beloved, if there are none among us who take hold on God our church is in a very sad state; a church without converts is a cloud without rain, a river without water. I thank God that we are not in such a plight, but we have many in this place who have lately taken hold upon the Lord, and found grace in his sight. This has been a means of grace to us all; the oldest and most established have been cheered by these new converts. Their coming among us has been a dew from the Lord; we have welcomed them as men do swallows in the spring. Their addition to our numbers has lit up new stars in our sky. Pray, my brethren, that there may be many such in all churches, for it is pre-eminently desirable that every awakened sinner should be stirred up to take hold upon God.

II. We will now consider another character considerably in advance of the former, who also stirs up himself to take hold of God. We very greatly need to have among us many THOROUGH BELIEVERS WHO TAKE HOLD UPON GOD BY FIDELITY TO HIM. I have seen applied to Calvin the motto, "He took fast hold." If ever a man did take fast hold on invisible things, it was that famous reformer. What he grasped he held with force of clear conviction, intelligent apprehension, and devout reverence. I am particularly anxious that

every member of this church should now look upon himself or herself separately and distinctly, and try to follow me in my description of a believer who takes hold of God. He is deeply sincere and thorough in all that he does. Shams and pretences are his abhorrence. He feels the solemn importance of dealing in spirit and in truth with the Lord, and of taking hold upon God himself and not on mere names and words and forms. He says within himself, "I am a Christian, and I will be so, by God's grace, not in name only, but in deed and in truth. I know that the outward form of religion is but a husk, and I resolve to feed upon the kernel. The substance of religion I mean to have, and not its shadows. I will take hold of all the outward which God has revealed; but I will mainly look to the inward, and my soul and spirit shall deal with the living God himself. If I live, I will live unto him: nothing short of this shall content me." Such a man opens his Bible and resolves to find out what God's will is, and he judges for himself, for he knows that he will have to render a personal account. He means to take hold for himself of every revealed truth, for he wishes not to be taught of man alone, but to be taught of God. He arouses all his wits to understand the doctrine and precepts of God's word; for he has become a disciple, and he therefore wishes to learn. His cry is, "I want to be thorough, I want to go to the soul and centre of things, and know truth by the teaching of the Spirit of God in my own heart. Not content with searching the word alone, he takes everything he finds there to God, and says, "Lord, I long to lay hold of thee in this truth. I desire not merely to know concerning Christ, but to know Christ. Not only to believe the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, but to feel the power of the Holy Ghost himself upon my soul, for I have said in my heart, 'My God, I would know thee and commune with thee, love thee and serve thee. My soul followeth hard after thee; when shall I come and appear before thee.'" Such a man, dear brethren and sisters, when he once knows the will of the Lord, has made up his mind to act promptly upon what he knows; his mind is expressed in the language of one of old, who said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." It is nothing to him what others may do, except that he regrets that they should do amiss. He puts his foot down and will not run with a multitude to do evil. He has made the word of the Lord to be the guide of his life, and he will not depart therefrom. His is no borrowed faith; he has embraced the truth of Jesus for himself, and he means to follow him at all hazards; and, as far as he can, he will have his household so ordered that all who come around him may see that Jesus is his Lord. Come fair or come foul, his hold is taken, and he will not leave it.

Such a man sets himself to extend the kingdom of Christ, impelled by inward zeal. Having obtained a solid fulcrum of assured knowledge, he now begins to use his lever and work upon others. Wherever he is settled in providence he sets about founding a church for his Lord. He is glad to be a member of a numerous church for the sake of Christian fellowship, but if he is cast in a desert place he can hold his own alone, for his hold is not on man, but on God. He can testify in the midst of others who fear not God; he would testify in the midst of heathen if he were called to it, for opposition and persecution cannot shake him. He

has taken hold of God; not of the church, nor of the minister, nor of the mere formal creed; he has passed beyond all things to the Lord himself, and his confidence is thus above the heavens. He knows that he cannot be placed where God is not, and therefore he feels that his best friend is always near. The eye of man is nothing to him, the presence of God is first and last with him.

He labours with earnest zeal to maintain and defend, and also to spread abroad, the truths which are verily believed among us. He is a man that calleth upon God, not merely in prayer, but by confessing his name, and owning his cause; and he stirs up himself to take hold upon God in the doing of all these things. Brethren, I earnestly wish that every member of this church was a man of this metal: we should be strong for God if this were the case. We have so many professors who are still babes, needing the feeding-bottle and the perambulator though they are forty years of age; what can we do with these? Others are unstable; they know something about truth, but not very much, and what they do know they are not sure of, and so they are ready to be bamboozled out of it. In the present age if any man can talk well he will get a following, whatever he may teach. I am astounded at some professors, who can hear this man to-day and that man the next, though the two are diametrically opposed. Surely there is some difference between truth and error, and mere cleverness cannot neutralize false doctrine. Our forefathers discerned between things that differed, and when false doctrine came before them they cast it out, notwithstanding the eloquence of its advocate. I do not want you to be bigots. God deliver us from their bitter spirit, but I do want you to be sound believers. There is a great difference between obstinate bigotry and a decided maintenance of that which we have believed. After all, what is the chaff to the wheat? There is a difference between the doctrines of men and the teachings of the Lord. No lie is of the truth. Garnish it as you may, it is still a lie. Oh to be rooted and grounded and built up in Christ! One of the most desirable things in this fickle age is to see around the minister of Christ a people who know the truth, and feel that the truth binds them fast to their God.

III. We take a step further in advance when we mention a third form of this taking hold of God. We need a development in the form of **THE WRESTLING PLEADER**. The expression is borrowed, as you know, from Jacob at the brook of Jabbok. He had begun to pray alone by the brook when an angel appeared to him, or rather the prince of angels himself. When Jacob saw the angel he laid hold upon him, and there was a wrestling match between them all through that night. It was a sight such as never did earth see before. After much weeping and agony, Jacob made a desperate clutch at the angel and cried, "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me." In the church of God we need many wrestling Jacobs. What means the text when it speaks of a man stirring himself up to take hold of God? The transaction takes this form. The good man feels the case urgently: the blessing which is wanted is laid on his heart, and he feels that he must have it. He is convinced of the necessity of it, and he is also certain that he cannot have it, except from God. Then he looks at the propriety of it and asks, "Is this a case which I can lawfully lay before God? I seek

such a thing, but may I expect the thrice holy God to give it me? Is it for his glory? When you have done that, dear friend, you have commenced well; now proceed to business. Go about it in an energetic but reasonable way; and next, turn to the Bible and see if the Lord has ever promised that which you seek. Search out promises, get them ready to your hand, learn their very words: then go before God and tell out your desire, and honestly declare your reasons for desiring it. Show the Lord that you know that he has promised the blessing, and then begin to plead with him to fulfil his own word. Very much of taking hold upon God must lie in using argument with him. The Lord knows the thing is good, but he wants *you* to know it, and in order that you may be well instructed in the value of the mercy you seek he wishes you to produce your arguments and bring forth your strong reasons. Many teachers use what we call the Socratic method, in which the boy is made to answer questions, not that his teacher may be instructed, but that the youth may learn. Set your case in order, and mention your pleadings before the Lord as if you were pleading in a court of justice; state why and wherefore this thing should be, and what you fear will happen if you be not answered. Return to the work again and again, as Abraham did when interceding for Sodom, and each time renew your strength. Especially bring forth the divine promises, and say concerning each one of them, "Do as thou hast said. Fulfil this word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." Plead the covenant and the faithfulness of God. That done, believe that God will keep his promise, and begin to expect the blessing. Act as if you had obtained it, for it is written, "Believe that ye have it, and ye shall have it." If the mercy be not then given, ask again—go through the same pleadings as before, amending them and increasing their power. The agony of prayer is somewhat like a great siege, in which one earthwork is cast up, and after awhile it is followed by another yet nearer to the town which is to be taken. One after another the besiegers raise their works till the place is quite hemmed in; then they bring up their guns, and begin to pound away upon the walls which they have resolved to capture. Thus must we go about to win the blessing which we need, using divine promises as our ramparts, and our strong reasons as our great guns. Remember it is not for God's sake that you are called upon thus to plead, but for your own. The Lord desires to convince you of the value of mercy, and when he has done it he intends to grant it to you.

A man who can take hold of God in prayer will be of the utmost value to the church. Why should we not learn this art? But oh how few there are who call upon his name, who stir up themselves to take hold of God. Sleepy prayers: God have mercy upon them! Prayers that do not mean anything! Prayers of men who can be put off with "No:" these are as common as stones on the road, and of less worth. We need importunity; the knocking at the gate of mercy again and again and again. We need the unconquerable resolve: "I must have it; it is for God's glory, and he has promised it, and I will not cease until I obtain it." We need to see the majesty of prayer among us again. If we had hundreds of church members who could take hold upon God, religion would revive, and we should no more have to complain of barrenness. God will rend the heavens and come down, and the

mountains will flow at his presence, when once his people take him at his word and pray as if they believed.

IV. The fourth point, and the last, is to mention one other form of this stirring up of ourselves to lay hold of God. It is one which I confess I have but seldom seen, and wish I could see on all sides. I have read of it in biographies, and past ages have seen it, and wondered at it. It ought, however, to be common in the church, and to be seen in every Christian. I mean **THE TAKING HOLD OF GOD BY THE STRENGTHENED BELIEVER**: the man who has got beyond doubts and fears, and grasped the eternal verities. No question now as to whether there is a God or no: he knows him, speaks with him, walks with him. In sacred communion the Lord has made known his secret to him, and shown him his covenant. Concerning the gospel, and things revealed, he does not care to argue: he is as sure of those matters as of the fact that there is a sun in the heavens or salt in the sea. He has passed beyond argument as to things of this sort. You might as well try to shake the earth out of its place as to remove him from his convictions: he knows them, and what is a great deal more, he intensely realizes them. He as much believes in God and his gospel as he believes in his own existence: and these things have as manifest power over him as the things which are seen and heard have over the human senses. He is familiar now with God, he talks with Jesus; the Holy Ghost dwells in him. He has passed into a spiritual realm, and has consciously to do with spiritual things. Such a man is now quite sure about God's being with him, for he dwells in his presence, and he never dares to act except under a sense of that presence. He is quite sure about God's keeping his promises, he dares not doubt that, for he has had too many proofs already of the faithfulness of God for him to distrust him. Now, see how steadily that man moves about: trial does not bow him down, he expected it, and he expects to be delivered out of it. If you rush in upon him with the most terrible information it does not distress him, for "he is not afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." What a grand character Abraham was, and only because he was grandly believing. Whenever faith gave way in Abraham, as it did now and then, for the best of men are only men, then he sank to the ordinary level, as he did when he denied his wife and said—"She is my sister." But when his faith is strong what a wonderful man he is. He never disputes with Lot about which shall take the fattest pasturage. Lot may have what he likes, for Abraham has his God. Lot may take the well-watered plain of the Jordan if he desires it, Abraham had sooner dwell alone with his God. When Lot is carried captive, and he feels it his duty to deliver his relative, he does not ask about how strong Chedorlaomer and the other three kings may be; that is nothing to him, God is with him, and he hastens to the conflict. He uses such means as are at hand, and asks his neighbours to join him in the pursuit, and then he marches confidently after Chedorlaomer, and smites him, and God gives the plundering host like driven stubble to his bow. You never find Abraham fretting, he is always peaceful in mind; he is not afraid of men, nor abashed before princes. His faith had made him heir of the world, and he knew it. He moved majestically, because he had learned to believe in God. When Isaac was to be offered up, how the strong man smothered his emotions, and went silently but

resolutely his three days' journey with his son, to the hill of which God had spoken to him. There the deed would have been done, had not the angel interposed, for it never entered into his mind to disobey the Lord. He believed so firmly in his God that whatever God had bidden him he resolved to do. Oh, could you get to the same realizing faith, how calm, quiet, serene, strong, happy, blessed would you be, for you would then to the fullest extent have taken hold of God. When we have such a man in a church he is a man of power in all respects. When he speaks it is almost as the oracles of God. Other speakers may dazzle you with eloquence, but this man overpowers you with grace and confounds the adversaries by his boldness. God gives to the church every now and then such a man. Such a one was Martin Luther, a man by no means free from faults, but gloriously free from doubt. Others think the gospel is true: Erasmus feels sure that it is, but Erasmus wants to die in a whole skin. Luther knows that justification by faith is right, and he will thunder it out, whether his skin shall be damaged or no. It will be better not to go to Worms, say timid advisers; things have come to such a pass that there will be danger to life:—you had better give up the contest, Luther, before you die in it. Future ages may take it up, but if you go to Worms you will certainly never come back again! Well, saith he, I shall go: yea, if there were as many devils there as there are tiles on the housetops, I should go, for I have to confess Christ there, and confess him I will. And when he is asked, "What would you do if the duke, your protector, should no longer harbour you?" "I shall take shelter," says he, "beneath the broad shield of the Almighty God." What are dukes and princes to such a man? He had taken hold of God, and he feels stronger than all men and all devils combined. There is nothing like this linking of one's self with the Eternal by faith. Such a man was Calvin. I picture him as he looked when going into the church of St. Peter, the libertines resolved that they would partake of the Lord's Supper, though he had declared they should not. They are men licentious in life and godless in character, but they mean to come to the table and take the sacred elements, whether he will or not. They care for no one, and mean riot and bloodshed. If he refuses they have sent him word that they will kill him in the church. He goes to the table and breaks the bread, and distributes it to the people of God, and hands not a mouthful to the profane, upon whom he looks with such pitying severity that, awed by the man's courage, they retire to learn better manners. We have in these days a race of time servers and word spinners to succeed the real men. There are hundreds who say it is undoubtedly untrue that children are in their baptism made members of Christ, children of God, inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, but still we will teach children to say so, and afterwards we will tell them that the words mean something else. Is this the way of doing the work of the Lord? Is this according to the gospel of faith, or after the manner of truth? Numbers of others say, "Yes, we see all this, we see popery coming back in the form of ritualism, but, at the same time, we cannot be decided, and shake ourselves clear of the accursed thing. We cannot tell what will happen; we will wait, and perhaps fate may favour us." I know what would happen if we feared

God more: we should sooner die than remain in any fellowship with popery. Every man who saw any fear of his being found in complicity with Antichrist would at once say, "I will not have it. Popery is abhorred of the Lord, and they who help it wear the mark of the beast. I hate Antichrist, and therefore I denounce it and cry, Down with it, raze it even to the ground." Everything that is of the Pope and popery would soon be put aside if men were but true to their consciences and their God. This generation is credulous, and yet unbelieving. It is deluded by the most transparent frauds. It swings like a pendulum to this and that; it believes in almost anything except its God, but in God and his truth and righteousness it will not be made to believe. Oh for a John Knox! We need a leader, firm and heroic, a man strong and stout because he has God with him. He that believeth in God will make men decide for the right when else they would vacillate. He is a commander-in-chief among the sons of men. His brow is like a flint, and he is not to be abashed. Let criticism rattle upon his armour like a hail-storm, he standeth fast and defies it all. May God make some of you into such heroes. I would to God he would make all of you valiant for truth, so that in your little circle you would be firm for God and scriptural doctrine and pure worship, because you have taken hold of him. God save us from the men of willow, and gutta percha, and plaster of Paris, such as would be dear if you could buy them at a shilling the dozen. Take these away, O father Time, and give us back men of granite, men of backbone, say rather, men of God. Oh that each man among us were aroused to take hold of God, and that all our faculties were stirred to their utmost depth, and that then they grasped the Lord. Ho comrades, see ye not the standard! It wavers! Shall it fall? The true soldier in the cruel fight, when he sees the standard-bearer struck down, and the fight thickening all around the banner, stirreth up all his strength and rushes into the strife, as a lion leaps on his prey. He strains every sinew, and throws every nerve into action, dashing forward to grasp the standard and to hold it aloft, touch it who dare. He smites right and left, and sooner than the banner shall be trailed in the mire, he will spill his life in crimson streams upon the ground. Up ye soldiers of Christ! Up ye lion-like men, and turn the battle to the gate! May God help you to do it for Christ's sake. Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah lxiv., and  
lxv. 1—10.

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HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—676, 674, 660.